Focus article draws complaint about tax status

By PAUL ASAY
THE GAZETTE

A local religious watchdog roup has asked the Internal tevenue Service to investigate /hether Focus on the Family nlawfully tried to sway voters ı the November presidential lection.

Focus officials say they've al-/ays worked within the law.

At issue is an article in the Citizen, a monthly magazine printed by Focus. The November article, titled "The 2004 Election: What's At Stake," compares presidential candidates George W. Bush and John Kerry in terms of their positions on abortion, embryonic stem-cell research and same-sex marriage.

"You're pro-life, and you want to preserve the traditional definition of marriage for the next generation," the article begins. "So which of the presidential candidates comes closest to sharing your values?"

Citizens Project, a group that has monitored Focus and other religious organizations since 1992, believes the article is biased and incomplete, and it asked the IRS in a Feb. 1 letter to investigate. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, Focus on the Family is forbidden to endorse political candidates or parties.

"Our organization believes that this article may have violated federal tax law with its use of code words such as 'pro-life' and with its implied support of President George W. Bush as a candidate for president," wrote Ellie Collinson, executive director for Citizens Project.

Focus officials say the article was written under the guise of its lobbying arm, Focus on the Family Action.

Focus on the Family Action, a 501(c)4, operates under a different set of tax criteria: Its money is separate from Focus on the Family and can be used to lobby without limits.

"It makes this particular article free and clear, as per our attorneys," said Tom Minnery, vice president of government and public policy for Focus on the Family Action.

Citizens Project isn't so sure. Collinson says that if the magazine is financed by the 501(c)3 Focus, it might not matter if the article was billed to the more lobby-friendly 501(c)4 Focus Action.

Officials from the California-based Alliance For Justice, a group that helps nonprofits understand such legal requirements, couldn't predict how the IRS will come down on the issue.

"It's an interesting question that I'd like to hear the IRS answer," said Liz Towne, director of advocacy programs for the Alliance For Justice.

Collinson said her group isn't sure whether Focus ran afoul of tax laws, and that's why Citizens Project asked the IRS to check into the matter.

"We're not going to make an accusation, because we don't know," she said.

The Citizen article is available online at www.family.org/cforum/citizenmag/coverstory/a0034350.cfm.

ATURDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2005

Focus pushes marriage amendment

Definition would apply only to male-female relationships

By PAUL ASAY
THE GAZETTE

Focus on the Family hopes to get a proposal for a constitutional amendment that defines marriage on the 2006 Colorado election ballot. Opponents already are planning rebuttals.

"Anticipating that it will occur is half the battle," said Ellie Collinson, executive director for the local civil-rights group Citizens Project.

The proposed amendment would define marriage as being exclusively between a man and woman. Focus has been one of the nation's leading supporters of such amendments and supports a similar national amendment.

The same-sex marriage debate has served as a rallying cry for many Christians. Some said the issue drove voters to the polls in record numbers in 2004 and helped President Bush win re-election.

Thirteen states passed amendments defining marriage last fall, according to The Heritage Foundation Web site.

"I think the election of 2004 brought out thousands and thousands of Christian voters to defend marriage," said Tom Minnery, Focus' vice president of government and public policy. "And they had some success. They're highly energized

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MARRIAGE AMENDMENTS

According to The Heritage Foundation, 17 states ıave marriage protection amendments in their contitutions, including 13 approved in 2004.

There are proposed constitutional amendments ı another 11 states, not including Colorado, accordıg to the foundation's Web site, www.heritage.ırg/Research/Family/Marriage50States.cfm.

MORE ONLINE Speak up! Share your thoughts on the gay marriage debate at **www.gazette.com.**

MARRIAGE: Group calls Focus 'toxic'

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to make an impact in 2006."

Opponents aren't surprised there's a move to put an amendment on the Colorado ballot.

"Certainly when we saw what happened (in the 2004 elections), we knew Colorado wouldn't be far away," said Julie Tolleson, spokeswoman for Equal Rights Colorado.

The gay lobbying group based in Denver is developing strategies to defeat the initiative, and Tolleson said the battle will be costly.

Their effort will likely involve more liberal churches, such as Pikes Peak Metropolitan Community Church. The church, led by the Rev. Nori Rost, is made up predominantly of homosexual believers.

"Certainly we would speak out against this amendment in whatever way is appropriate at that time," Rost said.

Her church will join the national gay-faith group Soulforce for a demonstration May 1 in front of Focus on the Family, which will be declared a "toxic religion zone" by the group.

Focus officials say they don't plan to head the drive to put the proposal on the ballot and hope churches will push the initiative.

"I'm happy that (this issue) is coming up now," said the Rev. Ted Haggard, senior pastor for the 11,000-member New Life Church in Colorado Springs. "I don't know how much leadership (New Life will provide), but we'll certainly be supportive. We'll be active."

Before the measure gets on the ballot, its wording will be scrutinized by the Colorado Secretary of State's Office. Supporters will then have to collect the signatures of 67,829 registered voters.